

Reversing Underachievement Among Gifted Black Students—Again!

Donna Y. Ford, Ph.D.

Children are not born underachievers, they learn to underachieve.—Ford (1996, 2010)

The most prominent and ubiquitous problem in education is the achievement gap—the poorer performance of Black and Hispanic students compared to White students. Nationally, data indicate that a four year difference exists, on average, between Black and White students at grade 12. Of course, the gap is smaller at some schools and larger at others; it might be even larger if data included the performance of students who drop out. Simply put, every school district grapples with this unfortunate reality.

Numerous reports, studies, polls, and blog posts implicate schools, families, or the students themselves as contributing to the achievement gap. For example, daily reports and commentary on the effects of teacher quality, teacher experience, and class size on student achievement make it virtually impossible to keep abreast! And the majority of these works focus on Black students in the context of low test scores, low achievement, and other aspects of school failure.

Gifted education is by no means exempt from the problems of education in general. Gifted students underachieve; associated with underrepresentation, there is clearly an achievement gap in gifted education, a reality often lost in the rhetoric, debate, and discussion. Few scholars concentrate consistently or for any length of time on the achievement gap in gifted education, on gifted underachievers, or on the underrepresentation of Black students in gifted education and Advanced Placement (AP), which may explain why so (too) little progress is evident. In a 1998 article, I noted that only 2% of articles in gifted education focused on gifted Black students; also noted was that several decades of studies have shown that Black students' underrepresentation consistently hovers at 50%. Two decades later, as of the 2008 data from the Office for Civil Rights, this has not changed. AP classes are even more segregated than gifted programs, averaging an underrepresentation rate of 60% nationally. In order to effect meaningful changes in the demographics of gifted education and AP classes, bold steps are necessary. Undergirding all of the needed changes is the elimination of deficit thinking. Deficit thinking resolutely hinders our ability and willingness to see potential and strengths in others; it feeds stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination, which I wrote about most recently in the second edition of *Reversing Underachievement Among Gifted Black Students*. Here, as in other works, I state that deficit thinking has no place in schools! Deficit thinking and related actions and decisions can be changed so that Black students can improve academically. Without our help, too many will continue to underachieve. I urge all educators, but those in gifted and AP education in particular, to:

(Continued on page 3)



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From the President

Greetings!

It is my distinct honor and privilege to begin my term as your TAG president for the next two years. TAG has enjoyed strong leaders in Susan Johnsen and Diane Montgomery over the last several years, and I have been humbled by all that they have accomplished. They have been excellent role models for me, gracious leaders, fair, impartial, and generous with their time and efforts on behalf of children with gifts and talents. For TAG to continue to be a leader in gifted education, you, the TAG Board, and I must work together to support the forward momentum that has been generated by our previous leaders.

At the annual CEC conference, TAG sponsors a preconference symposium focusing on a topic of great interest to the gifted education community. Last year we had a highly successful session on *Response to Intervention and Giftedness*, highlighting the theoretical perspectives and models from various states. This year our symposium will provide hands-on opportunities for participants to learn about practical applications for all levels of RTI. One of the best ways we can support TAG is by attending this symposium on Monday, April 25, 2011 in conjunction with CEC's Convention and Expo from April 25–28, 2011 at the Gaylord National Hotel and Convention Center in National Harbor, MD. We also want to urge you to participate in TAG's annual meeting and social on Tuesday afternoon, April 26, so do save those dates and come to the convention! This is one time when we can all get together and increase our knowledge, understanding, and skills to assist us in serving students with gifts and talents. A flyer with the registration information for the symposium is available in this newsletter.

I would like to highlight the new book series that TAG is publishing through Prufrock Press. The first book, *Response to Intervention for Gifted Students*, was available in November, and new titles are scheduled for Fall 2011. Look for more information about these books at the TAG symposium.

As a result of the recent TAG elections, the following individuals were elected to office. Please join me in welcoming them to their new term of service:

Julia Link Roberts, Western Kentucky University, Vice President

Elaine Dumas, Little Rock, Arkansas, Treasurer

Kimberley Chandler, The College of William & Mary, Newsletter Editor

Congratulations to these ladies and thanks to all of you who voted in the election.

The TAG Board looks forward to seeing all of you at the CEC Conference in April!

Cheryll M. Adams, President

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Reversing Underachievement among Gifted Blacks, continued

1. Provide formal training in gifted education to all educators (teachers, counselors, psychologists, and administrators) with attention to underrepresentation and underachievement;
2. Encourage (demand?) colleges and universities to have courses and degree offerings in gifted education;
3. Provide extensive professional development on becoming a culturally competent educator (understanding culture, cultural differences, and manifestations and effects of deficit thinking on students, school, and larger community; acquiring cultural knowledge, dispositions, and skills);
4. Encourage (demand?) colleges and university to have courses and degree offerings in multicultural and/or urban education;
5. Collaborate more with Blacks and other culturally different groups to increase family involvement and home-school-community partnerships;
6. Hold workshops, meetings, and task forces to listen to stakeholders, study current conditions, and make substantive changes with regards to the achievement gap, underrepresentation, and underachievement;
7. Conduct research about and with gifted Black underachievers, with an emphasis on listening to and learning from them;
8. Modify curriculum and instruction so that it is culturally responsive and multicultural at the highest levels and permeates all content areas and grade levels;

How can you help close the achievement gap between Black and White gifted students?

Provide training to all educators with attention to underrepresentation and underachievement.

Collaborate with Blacks and other culturally different groups to increase family involvement and home-school partnerships.

9. Address the social-emotional and psychological needs of gifted Black students with multicultural counseling models, techniques, and strategies;
10. Change policies and procedures in identification for gifted programs in order to eliminate bias and unfairness (e.g., teacher referrals, criteria, norms);
11. Change assessment instruments to incorporate assessment standards and reduce (ideally eliminate) bias; and
12. Serve students who are gifted but underachieving (e.g., adopt/create intervention strategies and programs, talent development programs, prevention programs and strategies).

Albeit a hard pill to swallow, the field of gifted education contributes to the achievement gap and underachievement. I think it is accurate to say that the achievement gap will narrow when gifted education and AP classes are desegregated. So much talent and potential are lost, and so many lives are diminished when students fail to have access to rigorous courses. We as educators, as a community, and as a nation suffer as well. Students who are ill-equipped to compete academically, locally, nationally, and globally place a fiscal and social burden on our communities—poor achievement is costly! We must increase achievement among Black students—identified as gifted and not identified as gifted—for their sake and our own. A mind is a terrible thing to waste (United Negro College Fund) and a mind is a terrible thing to erase (Ford, 2010).

Recommendations for Further Reading

- Banks, J. A., & Banks, C. A. M. (Eds.). (2010). *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives*. (7th ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Barton, P. E. (2003). *Parsing the achievement gap: Baselines for tracking progress*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Services.
- Barton, P. E., & Coley, R. J. (2009). *Parsing the achievement gap II*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Services.
- Boykin, A. W., Tyler, K. M., & Miller, O. A. (2005). In search of cultural themes and their expressions in the dynamics of classroom life. *Urban Education, 40*, 521–549.
- Ford, D. Y. (1996). *Reversing underachievement among gifted Black students: Promising practices and programs*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Ford, D. Y. (1998). The under-representation of minority students in gifted education: Problems and promises in recruitment and retention. *The Journal of Special Education, 32*(1), 4–14.
- Ford, D. Y. (2010). *Reversing underachievement among gifted Black students* (2nd ed.). Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, & practice* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Tomlinson, C. A., Ford, D. Y., Reis, S. M., Briggs, C. J., & Strickland, C. A. (Eds.). (2004). *In search of the dream: Designing schools and classrooms that work for high potential students from diverse cultural backgrounds*. Washington, DC: National Association for Gifted Children.

- *Mary Ruth Coleman and Sneha Shah-Coltrane, Authors*
- *Co-published with the National Association for Gifted Children and The Association for the Gifted.*

U-STARS~PLUS is centered on the belief that the ability to recognize students' strengths is enhanced when there is an environment that nurtures students intellectually and emotionally and when students are observed systematically. Recognizing a child's strengths, however, is only the first step. Once a child's strengths are recognized, teachers can respond to these strengths by providing advanced learning opportunities tailored to the student's needs. By looking for the strengths in children, our view of them is reframed, thus moving our understanding of them from "at-risk" to "at-potential." If students are viewed as "at potential" versus "at risk", their school experiences can be designed in positive ways by responding to their strengths with increasing levels of challenge. The essence of U-STARS~PLUS is to nurture, recognize, and respond to students, optimizing their learning and helping them thrive in the classroom.

U-STARS~PLUS (Using Science, Talents, and Abilities to Recognize Students ~ Promoting Learning for Underrepresented Students) is an instructional framework that empowers teachers to provide environments which nurture the intellectual and emotional well-being of young children (Grades K–3) who may be overlooked due to poverty, cultural/linguistic differences, and/or disabilities. U-STARS~PLUS provides high quality science and literature instruction using 32 popular children's books, allowing teachers to respond to children's strengths with challenging, advanced educational experiences. In addition, U-STARS~PLUS extends learning into the home, engaging families in meaningful ways to support a child's academic success.



Teacher's Observation of Potential in Students (TOPS) Folders

Teachers use U-STARS~PLUS TOPS folders as a tool to help systematically observe and recognize children who have outstanding potential and who may be gifted. TOPS folders engage teachers to make intentional and purposeful observations so that those observations can be used to provide more effective instruction and focus on individual strengths,

thus reinforcing the "at-potential" mindset. TOPS folders are organized around nine domains; learns easily, shows advanced skills, displays curiosity and creativity, has strong interests, shows advanced reasoning and problem solving, displays spatial abilities, shows motivation, shows social perceptiveness, and displays leadership.

Set of 5 individual student folders (ISBN 0-086586-455-1) and 1 class folder (ISBN 0-086586-456-X). 2010.

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*Please call (888) 232-7733 (toll free) or (703) 620-3660 for information on current CEC dues. Join online at <http://www.cec..sped.org>

CEC 2011 Convention and Expo

TAG Session Schedule

CEC-TAG Invited Showcase

PreK-12 Program Standards in Gifted Education	Susan Johnsen	Tuesday, April 26	11:00AM-12:00PM
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Regular Sessions & Posters

Name of Session	Speaker	Day	Time
Giftedness in a Culturally Diverse Classroom: Addressing Underrepresentation in Gifted Programs	Monica Roache	Tuesday, April 26	8:30 AM- 9:30 AM
Nurturing Potential in Preschool Children with Dual Exceptionalities and Dual Languages	Dana Fredebaugh	Tuesday, April 26	8:30 AM- 9:15 AM
Effective Programs for Twice-Exceptional Students: Identification, Curriculum, and Best Practices	Karin Tulchinsky Cohen	Tuesday, April 26	9:45 AM-10:45 AM
Making the Connection: Differentiating Curriculum Using Arts Integration Strategies	Magdalena Fitzsimmons	Tuesday, April 26	2:30PM-3:30PM
Reaching Underserved Populations in Academically/Intellectually Gifted Programs Through State Policy	Sneha Shah-Coltrane	Tuesday, April 26	2:30PM-3:30PM
Identity Construction and the Gifted Native Learner	Rudy Bentz	Tuesday, April 26	3:45PM-4:45PM
Identification System for Placement in Gifted Programs: Predictors of Informed Teacher Judgment	Robert Richardson	Tuesday, April 26	3:45PM-4:45PM
Accelerating Gifted Students' Vocabulary and Communication Skills: Promoting Higher Levels of Achievement	Donna Knoell	Wednesday, April 27	8:30AM-9:30AM

CEC 2011 Convention and Expo

TAG Session Schedule

Regular Sessions & Posters

Name of Session	Speaker	Day	Time
Self-Determination Theory and Gifted Learners	Jennifer Jolly	Wednesday, April 27	9:45AM-10:30AM
State Definitions, Policies, and Practices for Students Who Are Gifted and Talented	Mary-Catherine McClain	Wednesday, April 27	1:15PM-2:00PM
The CLEAR Curriculum: An Integration of Three Gifted Models	Kimberly McDuffie-Landrum	Wednesday, April 27	1:15PM-2:15PM
Culturally Responsive New Literacies in the Gifted Classroom: Engaging the Underrepresented	Melanie Lichtenstein	Wednesday, April 27	5:00PM-6:00PM
Growing Talented Writers	Jill Olthouse	Thursday, April 28	8:30AM-9:15AM
Exploring Research-Based Teaching Models to Benefit Students Considered Twice Exceptional	Wendie Castillo	Thursday, April 28	9:45AM-10:30AM
Equitable Access: Supporting Accelerated and Enriched Instruction For Diverse Learners	Elise Antoine	Thursday, April 28	11:00AM-12:00PM
Desegregating Gifted Education: Problems and Problems of Underrepresentation	Donna Ford	Thursday, April 28	1:15PM-2:15PM
Gifted Black Males in the Age of Obama: Current Status, Future Directions	Tyrell White	Thursday, April 28	1:15PM-2:15PM

**THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE GIFTED
CEC-TAG'S ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM**

***Meeting the Needs of Gifted Students
within an RtI Framework***

Monday, April 25, 2011, 9:00 am – 3:30 pm

Come be a part of this exciting discussion! Learn about meeting the needs of students with gifts and talents within a Response to Intervention framework. Be part of the process to develop a publishable booklet about RtI and gifted education! You will have a wonderful opportunity to work directly with leaders in the area of RtI and Gifted Education.

For more information about registration, visit TAG's Website (<http://www.cectag.org>) or contact Elaine Dumas, CEC Treasurer at edumas@aristotle.net or 501.663.7180.

The Association for the Gifted's (CEC-TAG) Annual Symposium
Meeting the Needs of Gifted Students within an RtI Framework

Monday, April 25, 2011

Gaylord National Hotel and Convention Center
National Harbor, MD

_____ Yes! I will attend the TAG symposium on April 25.

Name: _____

Affiliation: _____

Position: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Email Address: _____

_____ **I am enclosing \$75 which reserves my place at the symposium (includes lunch).**

Please mail this registration form and check to:

Attn: Elaine Dumas
CEC/TAG
4516 I Street, #1
Little Rock, AR 72205



**SAVE
THE DATE**



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